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ABSTRACT

A study examined differences in the language of direct mail advertising used by political campaigns at different levels--national state, and local. Seventeen direct mail fund-raising political campaign letters were content analyzed with Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin's typology of compliance-gaining techniques, language style and readability. The letters came from national campaigns with a national constituency, campaigns for a national office with a local constituency, and campaigns for local offices with local constituencies. Analysis revealed the following differences between national and local letters: (1) while national letters were emotional and personal in style, local letters were shorter and more general and attempted to maintain a professional, almost removed, style; (2) the national letters were the easiest in terms of readability whereas the local letters were the most difficult; (3) and the national letters contained the most compliance-gaining appeals, as well as explanation and warning appeals, while the local letters concentrated on explanation appeals. These differences probably exist because national letters are most likely written by professionals while local letters are most likely written by volunteers who have little experience with direct mail. Local campaigns may be more hesitant, however, to use the emotion-laden, harsh style of national letters because of their proximity to their constituency. (References, charts, and Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin Typology are appended.) (ARH)

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THE LANGUAGE OF FUND-RAISING DIRECT MAIL

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LETTERS FOR NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONSTITUENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at differences in the language of direct mail advertising used by political campaigns at different levels. Seventeen direct mail fund-raising political campaign letters were content analyzed for Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin's compliance-gaining techniques, language style and readability. The letters came from national campaigns with a national constituency, campaigns for a national office with a local constituency and campaigns for local offices with local constituencies. The national letters were found to be much more emotional and personal in style than the local letters. Local letters were more general and attempted to maintain a professional almost removed style. The national letters were the easiest in terms of readability with local letters being the most difficult to read of the three categories. The national letters contained the most compliance-gaining appeals. These appeals were most often explanation and warning appeals. The local letters concentrated on explanation appeals. These differences probably exist because national letters are most likely written by professionals while local letters are most likely written by volunteers who have little experience with direct mail. Local campaigns may be more hesitant, however, to use the emotion laden harsh style of national letters because of their proximity to their constituency.

THE LANGUAGE OF FUND-RAISING DIRECT MAIL
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LETTERS FOR NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONSTITUENCIES

One often unrecognized fact of politics is that you can not change a voter's mind during one political campaign. The time span is just too short. Therefore, the goal of every political campaign should be to locate those voters who have similar attitudes to the candidate and motivate those voters to vote. This is the real challenge of political campaigns.

One of the best ways to locate these voters (and motivate them) is through the use of direct mail advertising. Direct mail is a medium through which advertisers can extend their messages directly into the home. Over recent years direct mail has become very sophisticated due to the increased use of computer technology. Computers have made it easy to store, sort and produce demographic data about virtually every family living in the United States. Lists can be generated with names and addresses of people who support particular issues, have certain incomes and/or participate in particular activities. These lists are invaluable to the politician who wants to target a message to a particular audience. Thus, politicians have eagerly taken advantage of this 'new' sophisticated medium.

There are two types of political direct mail: persuasive and fund-raising. One could argue that all direct mail is

persuasive but these categories help conceptualize between fund-raising and non-fund-raising direct mail. The purpose of fund-raising direct mail is to raise money. Persuasive direct mail may have a variety of purposes. Miller and Robyn reveal that "the great bulk of political direct mail is neither used to solicit contributions nor to inspire immediate action, rather it is used to (a) provide the voter with more information about a candidate (or his/her opponent), (b) crystallize, reinforce or (hopefully) change the voters attitude toward the candidate, (c) urge the voter to go to the polls on election day, and (d) ultimately (and again hopefully) persuade the voter to cast his/her ballot on election day in a particular manner)" (p.5 1976).

The specialists disagree on how direct mail should be used. Direct mail specialist Ann Stone sees direct mail as a reinforcing tool and turnout mechanism (Rothenberg, 1983). Consultant Charlie Black of Black, Manafort and Stone feels direct mail should be aimed at "ticket-splitters" as a conversion tool (Rothenberg, 1983). Jim Nathan of Targeted Communications argues that direct mail can be useful regardless of the audience as long as an appropriate package is put together (Rothenberg, 1983).

The Republican party is confident that direct mail helps their candidates. Their post-election studies show that when voters were exposed to direct mail and not exposed to television advertising, their candidates enjoyed a 15.7% variance to the expected vote (1980 National Republican Congressional Committee

Post-Election Report, 1981). Scientific research is not as conclusive however. Direct mail may increase turnout (Eldersveld, 1956; Miller and Richey, 1980) but findings on attitude change are inconsistent. Several studies have found no significant attitude change as a result of direct mail (Miller and Richey, 1980; Miller and Robyn, 1976). Other studies show that direct mail can affect attitude change in low-salience and low-interest campaigns (Swinyard and Coney, 1978; Bositis and Miller, 1982). But regardless of these results, politicians continue to use direct mail.

Direct mail can obviously be a very successful medium for raising money. In 1983, Jesse Helms raised \$9,300,000. The Republican National Committee raised \$53,000,000. in the same year. NCPAC raised \$9,600,000. The Democrats too, are increasing the amount of money they raise by direct mail. By 1988 they plan to have over 1,000,000 direct mail donors (O'Brien, 1984).

At the state and local levels more and more candidates are using direct mail. Professional fund raiser Brad O'Leary suggests that for these races money should come from the following sources: PACs - 25%, direct mail - 25%, finance committee and special events - 50% (O'Leary, 1983). If the percentages vary too much from these figures then, O'Leary suggests, the candidate is not raising money as effectively as s/he should (O'Leary, 1983). However, Rob Bickert, the Deputy Director of Fund Raising for the National Republican

Congressional Committee suggests that while incumbents may reach O'Leary's percentages congressional challengers should rarely place much of an emphasis on direct mail. The costs and risks are too great. He suggests that the average challenger's revenues would break down as follows: special events - 50%, direct solicitation - 25%, PACs - 15%, and direct mail 10% (Bickert, 1983). The disparity probably lies in the fact that incumbents already have an established house list (as long as they have kept it clean - lists degenerate at a rate of 20% a year) while challengers at the congressional level rarely have the time, money or the amount of potential donors needed to raise large amounts of money by direct mail.

Even though direct mail is used so widely and is so successful for some candidates, very little research has been presented in our journals concerning direct mail as a medium. One of the few papers that specifically examined direct mail letters was presented to the 1983 Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association. Schmidt and Schmidt (1983) content analyzed eleven letters used in state and local elections. They found that the letters used the same style of appeals based on direct-request, explanation, credibility, promise, esteem or debt messages. Specifically, they were looking for Wiseman and Schensck-Hamlin's compliance gaining techniques. This study was limited in that only letters from state and local races were used and the majority of the letters (five) were from the same candidate suggesting they may have been

written by the same copywriter and also a possible explanation for their similarity.

Larry Sabato has done extensive research on political campaigns and direct mail advertising and notes that there is some consistency in direct mail packages developed by professionals. The envelope tends to be more personalized than the letter. This is to insure that the recipient actually opens the letter, which is extremely important. Live postage stamps are preferred to metered postage. Some professional direct mail consultants even prefer commemorative stamps over regular ones. Research by the Alcohol Research group of the University of California School of Public Health at Berkeley found that people who received letters with a commemorative stamp were more likely to return a contribution than those with regular stamps or metered postage (Sabato, 1984). Other findings indicate that letters with stamps affixed at a slight angle are more successful than those with stamps placed squarely in the corner of the envelope (Sabato, 1981). Apparently, this makes the letter appear more personal as if someone had affixed the stamp by hand.

The stationery used in professionally developed direct mail packages is usually a facsimile of personal stationery belonging to the candidate. The letter is usually printed in standard typewriter face in black ink (Sabato, 1984).

The language of direct mail is usually emotional and conversational. They are written in short paragraphs and usually at the sixth or eighth-grade level to make the message simple and

easy to read (Sabato, 1984). The candidate needs money and wants the recipient to send it.

Other characteristics cited by Sabato are: use of a lot of 'I's and 'you's; interspersing the recipients name throughout the letter; conveying urgency by giving deadlines; specifying what the contribution will be spent on; adding post scripts meant to evoke guilt, urgency, patriotism or anger toward the enemy. Direct mailers also believe that longer letters are more effective than shorter ones (Sabato, 1984).

This review suggests that the language of direct mail which is written by professionals tends to be 1) written at a fairly easy level of reading, 2) personalized, and 3) emotional. But there is not much research on direct mail used at local levels. What characterizes these letters? We do know that local campaigns use letters which attempt to gain compliance through direct request, explanation, credibility, promise, esteem, or debt messages. Are these the same techniques used at the national level? What differences exist between letters written for the national level and for local levels? Research is needed which compares different types of direct-mail letters.

This study will broaden the focus of previous research by examining the content of fund-raising direct mail letters used in national campaigns with national constituencies (N) (such as presidential or vice-presidential races), campaigns for national offices with state and local constituencies (NL) (senatorial and congressional races) and local campaigns with local

constituencies (L) (campaigns for state and local offices with district constituencies, e.g. state assembly offices, county offices, city offices). The following research questions guided the research. These categories of letters were used because of the differential amounts of money needed and used for each campaign. These differential amounts would have a significant impact on the use of direct mail advertising. Larger campaigns which need large amounts of money may place more emphasis on direct mail advertising campaigns than local campaigns which do not need to raise millions of dollars.

- Q1 Are there any differences in the language style used in fund-raising direct mail letters used in N, NL, and L campaigns?
- Q2 Are there any differences in the types of compliance gaining techniques used in fund-raising direct mail letters used in N, NL, and L campaigns?
- Q3 Are there any differences in the readability of fund-raising direct mail letters used in N, NL, and L campaigns?

METHOD:

The author content analyzed seventeen direct mail fund raising letters for compliance-gaining techniques and language style. Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin's (1981) typology of compliance-gaining techniques guided the analysis for compliance gaining. Language style was defined in terms of personalism, such as type of salutation and pronouns used, and physical characteristics such as number of pages, number of paragraphs, paragraphs per page, sentences per paragraph, and words per sentence. Readability of each letter was also calculated.

The letters had been received by various faculty members at a mid-size mid-Western university. The letters met the following criteria: they were addressed to a specific individual, they were from a political candidate, and the major purpose of the letter was to raise money for a candidate (not for a political party or an organization that supported a variety of candidates). There were eight letters from N campaigns, five letters from NL campaigns, and four letters from L campaigns. A list of the letters showing the office sought and name of candidate is presented in Table 1.

The typology of compliance-gaining techniques used in this study was developed by Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin (1981). They developed an inductively derived taxonomy of compliance-gaining strategies by presenting subjects with persuasive situations and

asking them how they would respond in these situations. Table two presents their fourteen category taxonomy.

The readability formula used in this study was developed by Rudolf Flesch (1948). Reading ease is determined by the following formula: $RE = 206.835 - .846WL - 1.015SL$ where RE stands for Reading Ease, WL stands for word length (syllables per 100 words) and SL is sentence length (length in words).

RESULTS

Language Style

Research question number one asked what differences exist in the language style used in N, NL, and L direct mail letters. Language style was examined in terms of personalism and physical characteristics. Eleven of the letters in this study were addressed to "dear friend." Two of them even had the recipients name in the salutation. Almost all of the letters were written in a conversational style with emphasis on words like I, You, We, Together, and you can help. Three letters were not quite as conversational. They were more general and distant. These letters were from local candidates.

The language used in these letters also had several other characteristics. The language tended to be emotional, bold, and dramatic. The following words and phrases were typical:

drastic, harmful, threatens, stability, hope,
optimism, fear, hardship, half-truths, cruel,
inhuman, strength, weakness, blatant, dark,
enormous, radical, holocaust, utterly destroy,
cries of the people, grave concern, danger,
frighten, evil, shrouds, burden

The local letters were not as emotional as the state or national letters. The language of these letters was more general and dealt with the candidates from a more professional point of view.

Table three shows the results of statistical computations of the physical style of the letters. The N letters were consistently longer than both the NL and L letters with the average pages lengths being 5.75, 3.6 and 1 respectively. The N and NL letters tended to have more paragraphs per page ($X = 10.99$, $X = 10.5$) and fewer sentences per paragraphs ($X = 1.82$, and $X = 1.54$) than did the local letters. The typical N letter had around ten paragraphs per page with each paragraph containing very few sentences. In several letters each line was separated and indented as a paragraph.

The second research question asked what are the differences in the types of compliance gaining techniques used in N, NL, and L letters. Eight of the fourteen strategy types were contained in the letters. Table four shows the breakdown of appeals per letter. The explanation appeal has three sub-categories: credibility, values and empirical evidence.

The N letters contained the largest number of appeals per

letter ($X = 4.875$) than the NL ($X = 4.4$) and L ($X = 2.75$) letters. This corresponds to the page length with the N letters being longer than the NL and L.

The most common appeal was the explanation appearing in all but one N letter and one NL letter. At the N level the explanation by values was the most common of the three explanation types. The second most common appeal was the warning. This usually took the form "this is what will happen if I am not elected."

There was only a small difference between the mean appeal at the N level ($X = 4.875$) and the mean at the NL level ($X = 4.4$). The only change came in the number of explanation appeals. The NL letters used less.

The L letters concentrated on explanation appeals. They were characterized by the traditional arguments on why you should vote for the candidate and send money.

The final research question asked if there are any differences in reading ease between N, NL, and L letters. The Reading Ease score places the letter on a scale from 0 (practically unreadable) to 100 (easy for any literate person) (Flesch, 1948). A score of 100 represents material that should be understandable by people who have passed the fourth grade. The average RE score for the N letters was 60.94, the NL letters 56.1 and L letters 46.41. The letters are listed by order of readability, with the easiest letters first in Table Five.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that local campaigns have not developed the sophistication of the larger national campaigns when it comes to direct mail advertising. The local level letters tended to be shorter, contain less of a variety of appeals and were more difficult to read than the national letters. They were also written in a more general "removed" style of language. The national letters were longer, about 6-7 pages in length, contained a variety of appeals and were written in a more personal style. These results are not surprising since the national campaigns have (and need to raise) more money than the local campaigns. They have spent more developing and testing their strategies and are most likely not willing to share their results with others (the author, for example, was consistently 'put-on hold' when requesting information from professional direct mailers).

But the question now focuses on the style of language used in the letters. The language of the national letters is extremely emotional and dramatic. The appeals are often based on altruism, warnings, promises and ingratiation. As Sabato points out "it is standard practice to exaggerate broadly, just on or over the edge of lying: 'I wouldn't quote somebody completely out of context,' says one direct mailer. 'I wouldn't write something that is blatantly untrue'" (Sabato, 1984, p. 43). Perhaps, then, local

campaigns are not as willing to use these tactics which may insult the electorate they are so close to. National campaigns do not have to worry about a few insulted constituents. The number of dollars that can be raised outweighs the possible ramifications of a few disgruntled voters.

Conclusions

Direct mail is a medium by which candidates can take their appeals directly into the homes of the electorates. The candidate can personalize the letter to the individual constituent with the help of high technology and targeting.

National letters tend to be conversational and emotional in style, contain a wide variety of appeals, average six pages long, contain short paragraphs which usually consist of one or two sentences and are easier to read than local letters. Local letters are brief, have a limited variety of appeals, are written in a more general style of language and are more difficult to read than national letters.

The style of national letters results from professional fund raisers developing and testing them over time. Local letters have either not caught on to this style or are resisting it, trying to maintain a more traditional approach to campaigning.

Future research might consider extending the sample number of letters examined and also consider the amount of space dedicated to each appeal in each letter. This study only counted the appeals per letter and did not attempt to measure the amount

of space devoted to each appeal.

The results of this study may be limited by the small number of local letters analyzed compared to the larger number of national letters sampled. However, a quick glance at the tables provided suggests that the letters within each group were somewhat homogenous. Thus, this research provides direction for future research and gives some indication that differences do exist between letters written for local and national constituencies.

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1. Ronald Reagan	presidential
2. Walter Mondale	presidential
3. Walter Mondale	presidential
4. Gary Hart	presidential
5. Gary Hart	presidential
6. Gary Hart	presidential
7. George McGovern	presidential
8. Alan Cranston	presidential
9. Tom Harkin	senatorial
10. Bob Packwood	senatorial
11. Jim Hunt	senatorial
12. Paul Simon	senatorial
13. Pat Schroeder	congressional
14. Tom Hodson	county judge
15. Susan Gwinn	prosecutor
16. Karen Harvey	county commissioner
17. Jolynn Boster	state representative

List of Letters

Table 1

Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin Typology

- I. Sanction Strategies
 - A. Reward Appeals
 - 1. Rewards are controlled by the actor
 - a. Ingratiation: Present reward from actor implies compliance
 - b. Promise: Compliance implies future reward from actor
 - c. Debt: Past reward from actor implies compliance
 - 2. Rewards are controlled by the target
 - a. Esteem: Compliance implies future reward because of target's action
 - 3. Rewards are controlled by circumstance
 - a. Allurement: Compliance implies future reward because of the action of forces other than the actor or target.
 - B. Punishment Appeals
 - 1. Punishments are controlled by the actor
 - a. Aversive Stimulation: Non-compliance implies present punishment
 - b. Threat: Non-compliance implies future punishment
 - 2. Punishments are controlled by the target
 - a. Guilt: Non-compliance implies future punishment because of target's actions
 - 3. Punishments are controlled by circumstance
 - a. Warning: Non-compliance implies future punishment because of action of forces other than the actor or target
- II. Altruism strategies
 - A. Altruism: "Comply for my sake"
- III. Argument Strategies
 - a. Response controlled by rationale, not revealed by actor
 - 1. Direct Request: "I want you to do this"
 - b. Response controlled by rationale, revealed by actor
 - 1. Explanation: The reason for complying is based on evidence
 - c. Response controlled by rationale, situational context revealed by actor
 - 1. Hinting: Given this context, target should infer desired response
- IV. Circumvention Strategies
 - A. Deceit: Given false rationale or reward, compliance is requested

Source: Wiseman and Schenck-Hamlin, 1981

TABLE 2

	Number of pages	Number of paragraphs	Paragraphs per page	Sentences per paragraph	Words per sentence	RE Reading Ease rating	
1	4	46	11.5	1.13	25.2	46.7	
2	6	62	10.33	2.16	15.8	65.59	
3	7	67	9.6	2.6	12.17	80.72	
4	6	66	11	1.9	15.8	63.05	National Letters
5	6	80	13.3	1.6	18.36	63.05	
6	8	87	10.87	2.2	16.3	56.62	
7	2	20	10	1.45	21.2	53.24	
8	7	79	11.3	1.52	16.9	58.55	
9	4	63	15.8	1.2	12.5	66.40	
10	3	29	9.7	1.7	18.2	41.16	
11	4	42	10.5	1.7	17.3	62.38	NL Letters
12	4	42	10.5	1.2	21.7	51.99	
13	3	18	6	1.9	15.2	58.58	
14	1	9	9	1.8	14.6	49.89	
15	1	5	5	2.4	14.42	47.53	
16	1	4	4	2.25	15.9	41.8	Local Letters
17	1	7	7	2.14	15.5	46.44	

Physical Style

Table 3

Letter Number	Ingratiation	Promise	Debt	Esteem	Allurement	Aversive Stim.	Threat	Guilt	Warning	Altruism	Direct Request	Exp. Cred.	Exp. Value	Exp. Emp. Evidence	Hinting	Deceit	Total	
1	1			1				1	1				1	1			6	
2									2	1		1	2	1			5	
3		1			1				1	1		2	2				6	
4	2	2							1	2		2	2				6	X=4.875
5	1	1			1			1	2			1					6	
6	1	1								1			3				4	
7	1				1					1							3	
8									3	1		2					3	
9									4	1		1	1				4	
10	1				1				1	3							4	
11	2	1			2				1	1			1				6	X=4.4
12	1	1							1	2		1					5	
13									1	1			1				3	
14												1	1	1			3	
15												1	1				2	
16										1		1	1				3	X=2.5
17												1					2	

Table 4
APPEALS PER LETTER